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ABSTRACT

A description is given of the Social Studies Professional Semester at the State University of New York at Albany, a program attempting to provide the elements necessary for the development of reflective teaching. The 16-week program is designed to reduce the separation between clinical field experiences and professional education studies for preservice secondary teachers. The program has three phases: (1) university-based methods course and directed field experience; (2) student teaching; and (3) post-student teaching. The program's focus is on encouraging continuous reflections or theorizing about teaching practice, and throughout the semester teaching is presented as an investigative activity. Journals, observation assignments, and the discussions they generate, serve as a backdrop for the treatment of specific teaching methods. Student teachers are encouraged to engage in the action research cycle (planning, acting, observing, and reflecting) in order to discover possibilities, to identify patterns and/or relationships in their practice, to judge and appraise practice, and to take actions based upon analysis of their past practice. During the post-student teaching phase of the semester students discuss and present their projects and link their findings to earlier discussions of specific approaches to teaching. (JD)

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# Teacher Values and the Construction of Curriculum

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## Teacher Values and the Construction of Curriculum

Educational literature is filled with claims for the value of theories in guiding practitioners. A cursory glance through any curriculum or teaching methods texts will provide variety of theories that have been "proven" to work in the classroom. While teachers may couch descriptions of what they do in the language of these theories, many have little regard for educational theories as guides for practice (Lortie, 1975; Petty & Hogben, 1980). For many teachers, as a result, the broader questions of teaching addressed in the educational literature (i.e., nature of learning; the role of the school in society, etc.) are viewed as artificial and separated from the "real world" activities of the classroom. As Goodman (1986) asserts, this situation promotes the divorce of the act of teaching from its underlying educational, social, and ethical dimensions. Several recent studies (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Goodman, 1986; Ross, in press) illustrate how the "excessive realism" of preservice teachers contributes to the development of a utilitarian perspective toward teaching, in which, substansive questioning of the curriculum (what's worth teaching and why), the nature and purpose of instruction, the complexity of interpersonal relationships, the power structure of schools/classrooms, and the role of the school in society are rarely considered.

Despite the findings of recent research on teacher perspective development, it would be a mistake to characterize teachers as operating with a utilitarian perspective as atheoretical. While teachers may distain established educational theories, they rarely

take actions that do not make sense to them. As Shavelson (1983) points out, "teachers are rational professionals who, like other professionals such as physicians, make professional judgments and carry out decisions in an uncertain, complex environment...teachers' behaviors are guided by their thought judgements, and decisions (pp. 392-393). But, how can teachers' thoughts, actions, and decisions be characterized as rational when there is ample evidence that many professional teachers ignore "established" theories and research findings about teaching? An answer may be found in the relationship between the nature of teaching and the reasoning behind specific teaching practices.

**The Relation of Theory and Practice in Teaching**

Research on teacher thinking has illustrated that teachers develop and hold a variety of theories about their practice (e.g., Bussis, Chittenden, & Amarel, 1976; Elbaz, 1981; Olson, 1981). These preconceptions and implicit theories, according to Clark (1988), "are not neat and complete reproductions of the educational psychology found in textbooks or lecture notes. Rather teachers' implicit theories tend to be eclectic aggregations of cause-effect propositions from many sources, rules of thumb, generalizations drawn from personal experience, beliefs, values, biases, and prejudices" (p. 6).

Teaching is practical work carried out in a socially constructed, complex, and institutionalized world of schooling and that world shapes action and gives context to its meaning (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986). As a result, for teachers to be effective they

must accomplish their aims in ways that are consistent with the circumstances of their practice. Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue that all practical activities are guided by some theory.

> Teachers could not even begin to 'practice' without some knowledge of the situation in which they are operating and some idea of what it is that needs to be done. In this sense those engaged in the 'practice' of education must already possess some 'theory' of education which structures their activities and guides their decisions. (p. 113)

Beard, in his classic work on the secondary social studies curriculum in the 1930's, described why it is important for teachers to be aware of their own preconceptions, theories, and values and how these influence the teaching practice.

> Every human being brought up in society inevitability has in mind a frame of social knowledge, ideas, and ideals--a more or less definite pattern of things deemed <u>necessary</u>, things deemed <u>possible</u>, and things deemed <u>desirable</u>; and to this frame or pattern, his thought and action will be more or less consciously referred. This frame may be large or small; it may embrace an immense store of knowledge; it may be well organized with respect to categories of social thought or confused and blurred in organization; and the ideal element in it may represent the highest or lowest aspirations of mankind. But frame there is in every human mind....Since this things known cannot be placed before children in the school room, there must and will be, inevitably, a selection, and the selection will be made with reference to some frame of knowledge and values,

more or less consciously established in the mind of the selector. (1934, p. 182)

As illustrated in the findings of research on teacher thinking and teacher socialization, the practice of teaching is not just some kind of thoughtless behavior that exists separately from theory. These diverse bodies of research reconfirm Dewey's (1904/1964) argument on the relation of theory to practice in education. That is, the assumptions that all "theory" is non-practical and all "practice" is non-theoretical misguided. "Theories" are not bodies of knowledge that can be generated out of a practical vacuum and teaching is not devoid of any theoretical reflection.

The reasons why teachers do what they do (what Beard describes a frames of social knowledge and values) are indeed complex notions and have not been widely studied from a teacher education perspective. What seems likely though is that these ideas are geared to achieve concrete objectives, using practices that are linked to specific settings (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986). Argyris and Schon (1978) described these ideas as "theories of action." Theories of action are often consciously held, and teachers are able explicate them . However, sometimes teachers may not be conscious of the reasons for their actions (implicit theories) and in some instances teachers' unconscious theories of action are in conflict with their "espoused theories." The existence of unexamined and conflicting theories of action contribute to the development of utilitarian perspectives toward teaching--that is, emphasizing "how to questions" and ignoring "what and why questions." In many

instances, particularly at the preservice level, this situation produces a narrow view of curriculum and the uncritical use of teaching methodologies (Tabachnick, Popkewitz, & Zeichner, 1979-80; Goodman, 1984, 1985; Ross, 1987).

In order to adequately address this condition teacher educators must realize two things. First, the narrow or uncritical perspective, though limited, has a rational and practical basis in the novice teacher's work. In other words, teachers are actively engaged in the construction of meanings or practical theories of action that guide their behavior in the classroom. Second, tacit personal knowledge (unrecognized theories of action) should be made explicit so that the teacher and teacher educator can explore and critique them. This requires that teaching be approached as an investigative activity rather than a reproductive activity.

To accomplish this teacher education should help make preservice teachers more aware of their own past experiences and preconceived beliefs about teaching, curriculum, students, and the role of schooling so that they may be subjected to scrutiny. The goal should not be to disprove the relevancy of these experiences, but simply to expose individual beliefs to critical examination and to produce teachers with the disposition and skills to engage in systematic analysis of their own curricular goals and methods.

**Teacher Education and the Development of Practical Theories of Teaching**

When teachers research and reflect on their actions they are no longer solely reliant on accepted educational theories or bound by utilitarian perspectives in justifying their behavior. Through

systematic analysis and reflection practitioners are able to recast the relationship between theory and practice, produce grounded theories, and develop professionally (Argyris, 1982; Harris, 1987; Haysom, 1985; Oberg, 1986). There is no a recipe that will assure the attainment of the goals described above. However, one of the ways in which we, as teacher educators, can improve our effectiveness in these areas is through building a dialogue regarding our own programs and practices. What follows is a brief description of the structure and practices of the Social Studies Professional Semester at the State University of New York at Albany, a program attempting to provide the elements necessary for the development of reflective practitioners of teaching.

Program Structure

University teacher education has traditionally promoted a technical/management approach to the classroom despite Dewey's (1904/1964) admonition that technical proficiency at the beginning stages of teaching is many times achieved at the cost of professional growth. For Dewey, the goal of teacher education is to foster reflective practitioners.

> Practical work should be pursued primarily with reference to its reaction upon the professional pupil in making him a thoughtful and alert student of education, rather than to help him get immediate proficiency. For immediate skill may be got at the cost of powers to go on growing. (Dewey, 1904/1964, p. 320)

Of late, there as been increased attention in the field of teacher education to the development of programs that reflect Dewey's aims.

Most of the programs described in the literature incorporate some type of empirical inquiry into teacher preparation (e.g., Biott, 1983; Burg & Schaafsma, 1987; Jennings, 1987; Gitlin & Teitelbaum, 1986) and several have linked Dewey's description of the relation of theory to practice in education to the development of critical theory in education (e.g., Adler & Goodman, 1987; Ross & Hannay, 1987). The program described below illustrates an endeavor to put in place several of the elements described as essential in educating reflective practitioners.

The Social Studies Professional Semester is a 16 week program designed in an attempt to reduce the separation between clinical field experiences and professional educational studies for preservice secondary teachers. The program is divided into three phases: (1) university-based methods course and directed field experience (7 weeks); (2) student teaching (8 weeks); and (3) post-student teaching program (1 week).

The first phase of the professional semester, integrates a study of secondary teaching methods with a supervised pre-student teaching field experience in at one the university's student teaching centers. Student teaching centers are selected schools where administrators and faculty have expressed interest in and commitment to the preparation of new teachers. During this phase of professional semester students participate in a variety of activities both at the university and in the schools. A typical day might include a morning seminar at the university for all students and "flex time" in the afternoon for for individuals to make school

visits, work in the curriculum library at the university, or meet with their methods professor.

During the student teaching phase of the program the link between the university and the school is enhanced by using "center professors" whose charge it is to oversee the student teacher's progress during the student teaching period. Center professors are adjunct clinical professors whose role is much like that of a college supervisor, the major difference is that the center professor is located in the school, and provides immediate consultation and help to both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. Center professors also conduct seminars for student teachers, and provide input into the structure of the overall program and on occasion lead sessions in the methods course. This dimension of the program allows for a closer relationship between the people involved in the preparation of a beginning teacher. The post-student teaching program provides a week for summative assessment of the student teacher's performance during student teaching as well as analysis and debriefing on all of the semester's activities.

Program Activities

The activities of the professional semester might be described as a "dialogue-based" approach to teacher education. There is a concerted effort to move students away from relying on any single frame of reference (whether drawn from personal experience or encountered as an "abstract construct," such as discovery learning). Instead, the focus is on encouraging continuous reflection or

theorizing about teaching practice. The program's structure and activities are heavily influenced by Dewey's democratic image of education, which Schubert (1967) describes as "contending that the process of determining how to pursue one's sense of meaning and direction is as central to educational development as particular content studied" (p. 14). It is important to note that process is not valued over content. In fact, the intensity of the professional semester heightens the "survival concerns" of the preservice teachers, which requires that they spend considerable effort on curriculum content as well as its delivery. The goal of the program is to provide the type of process/content balance that will assist new teachers with the acquisition of the knowledge and skills essential to growth as professional beyond the survival stage of learning to teach.

Throughout the professional semester, teaching is presented as an investigative activity. During the first phase of the semester students are asked to develop a "rationale" or frame of reference for their teaching by participating in activities such as an open-ended survey of their perceptions of schools, learners, and the teaching process and follow-up discussions in class. The activities of the methods class are centered around the issue of how teachers should deal with value decisions they face in the classroom and as part of the schooling process. As Shaver and Strong (1982) point out the question for teachers to face is not whether you will deal with values, "it is rather <u>what</u> will you do about values and <u>will you be aware</u> of the influence of your own values and make it as

conscious and rational as possible?" (pp. 8-9).

The development of an explicit rationale or practical theory of teaching as distinct from tacit theories of action or as Shaver and Strong label them, frames of reference, is certainly not easy. However, the structure of the professional semester provides ample opportunity for student teachers to participate in school activities prior to beginning their student teaching, and they can begin a systematic search for a well-grounded rationale for their teaching. During the pre-student teaching field experience, student teachers keep journals about their experiences in addition to completing structured field observation assignments, which are designed to focus attention on various aspects of schooling (i.e., school/community relations, student learning styles, teacher planning processes, etc.).

Journals, observation assignments, and the discussions that they spawn, serve as a backdrop for the treatment of specific teaching methods and help the student teachers and the instructor to resist "context stripping" that many times characterizes the presentation of teaching methods. Students' current experiences in the field keep discussions of the mechanics or techniques of teaching presented in methods classes "honest." Attention is given to the "context-boundedness" or the socially constructed reality that exist in each individual setting, which assists students in transferring knowledge and skills from the university methods class to the classroom in which they will soon be teaching.

The activities described above take place during the initial phase of the professional semester and emphasize reflection upon personal values and the setting in which the individual's teaching will take place. Once student teaching begins, the student teacher's inquiry into teaching is recast in terms of professional development and accountability. That is, they are asked to explicitly justify their actions in the classroom. Student teachers carry out inquiry projects that focus on one or more of what they consider to be the significant features of their teaching (see Haysom, 1985). This allows them to begin an overview of their own teaching that is quite explicit and helps beginning teachers identify personal strengths and weakness that might deserve further attention.

The inquiry projects require student teachers to respond (in writing and then in follow-up discussion with their supervisor) to the following questions:

(1) Are the conditions you provide for learning optimal?

(2) What are these conditions that you have established?

(3) On what rationale do you base your answer to question #2?

(4) Is your rationale sound and reliable?

(5) Can the rationale be applied to other subject-matter areas, grade levels, schools, etc?

The first two questions make explicit some the significant features of the student teacher's practice. The next one identifies the practical theory of teaching (theory of action) with respect to those features, and the final two questions require that evidence be

provided in support of the justification identified. This exercise is initially approached by having student teachers construct a chart linking "significant features," "rationale," and "justification" of their current practice. However, as student teaching progresses students are required identify a specific area of concern regarding their practice and to begin systematic analysis of this feature.

During the student teaching seminars the notion of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982) is presented as an approach to improving teaching practice and developing a well-grounded classroom curriculum. Kemmis and McTaggart describe action research as a way in which individuals can organize conditions of their experience so that they can learn from it, and make the experience accessible to others. To do action research student teachers are asked to: (a) develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening; (b) act to implement the plan; (c) observe the effects of action in the context in which is occurs; and (d) reflect on these as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and so on, through a succession of cycles. The common-sense framework provided by the action research cycle provides a rational and systematic approach to the analysis of teaching practice, which is easy for beginning teachers to understand and implement

Student teachers are encourage to engage in the action research cycle (planning, acting, observing, and reflecting) in order to discover possibilities, to identify patterns and/or relationships in their practice, to judge and appraise practice, and to take actions based upon analysis of their past practices. Throughout student

teaching, supervisors and student teachers discuss the ongoing inquiry, and many times supervisor field notes as well as audio and video tapes of the student's teaching, peer observations, etc. provide the evidence that is considered at the reflection stage of the action research cycle.

Finally, during the post-student teaching phase of the semester, students discuss and present their projects and link their findings to earlier discussions of specific approaches to teaching secondary social studies. The process of action research, as presented here, fits well with the ultimate aim of the professional semester, which is to provide beginning teachers with a structure for an effective approach to teaching as a novice and a framework for further development as a professional teacher.

The Social Studies Professional Semester at Albany seeks to break down the barriers that have traditionally hindered the effectiveness of teacher education programs, such as the separation of theory and practice, university and school, tacit and espoused beliefs. New possibilities for the program are currently being investigated, including the expansion of the number of student teaching centers, lengthening the program beyond one semester, and offering the methods portion of the semester at student teacher center sites. The program is constantly searching for better ways of educating students of teaching and one of the most important by-products of the programs structure and activities is the development of a community of people that are concerned about the preparation of new teachers. The continued growth of this community, as with any

community, is dependent upon the improvement of communication. Systematic and continuous inquiry into all the conditions that affect the beginning teachers and the people involved in their preparation is the foundation of this program. The early findings of research on the professional semester suggest that graduates have attitudes towards teaching and their teacher preparation are positive and that they approach their practice a critical and reflective manner. A large scale follow-up study is now in progress to determine if the Social Studies Professional Semester produces lasting effects on teachers' practices.

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